

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CARPER). Without objection, it is so ordered.

EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that morning business be extended until 4:30 today with Senators allowed to speak for a period not to exceed 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REID. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate stand in recess until 4:30 this afternoon.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 3:13 p.m., recessed until 4:31 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. NELSON of Florida).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nevada is recognized.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate stand in recess until 5:15 p.m. today.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 4:32 p.m., recessed until 5:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. JOHNSON).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. In my capacity as a Senator from the State of South Dakota, I suggest the absence of a quorum. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

EQUAL PROTECTION OF VOTING RIGHTS ACT OF 2001—Continued

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the

Standing Rules of the Senate, hereby move to bring to a close the debate on S. 565, the election reform bill:

Christopher Dodd, Harry Reid, Charles Schumer, Ron Wyden, Debbie Stabenow, Patty Murray, Tom Daschle, Jeff Bingaman, Daniel Inouye, Carl Levin, Max Baucus, Joe Biden, Pat Leahy, James M. Jeffords, Barbara Mikulski, Bob Graham, and Edward M. Kennedy.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum with respect to the cloture motion be waived.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, for the information of the Senate, I would like to announce to all Members who have amendments on the finite list of amendments that first-degree amendments must be filed prior to 1 p.m., Thursday, February 28. If Members have already submitted amendments, then it is not necessary to resubmit an amendment.

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I would like to take this opportunity to commend Senators DODD, MCCONNELL, SCHUMER, and BOND for their dedication and diligence in addressing what I believe to be an issue of critical importance to our country—protecting voting rights and ensuring the integrity of the electoral system in our nation. Especially given the events in the world today, making certain that each citizen's vote is counted and promoting public trust and confidence in our election process is crucial.

The State of Washington has a long and trusted history as a leader in election administration. Through great efforts and cooperation, the state has pioneered such programs as motor voter, provisional balloting, vote by mail, and absentee voting.

I thank Senator DODD, the chairman of the Rules Committee for his support for an amendment that I offered with Senator MURRAY's support that has been adopted. The amendment guarantees that States are able to continue using mail-in voting, while also providing new safeguards to make mail-in voters aware of how to properly fill out their ballots, and how, if needed to obtain a replacement.

Voters in my State are proud of our system that offers voters the option of voting by mail or in the polling place, and they are extremely committed to seeing it continue. The mail-in ballot, in my opinion, offers voters several advantages. First, it allows voters to cast their ballots on their own time and at their own convenience. It also allows voters to make more informed choices, as they are able to consult literature sent by the state and by the campaigns in making their decisions. Because these votes are cast without the pressure of other voters waiting in line, or without the time crunch of being late to work or to pick up the kids, voters are also less likely to make mistakes that will disqualify their ballots.

In addition, the mail-in system is very secure. Each ballot that is cast by

mail requires, that the voter sign the outer envelope. This signature is then checked against the voters signature that is kept on file and only when there is agreement that the signatures match is the ballot counted. Washington State has consistently increased the number of voters choosing to vote by mail and through provisional voting without any allegations that these types of voting have involved fraud or other misconduct. In fact, the procedures in place have consistently ensured the integrity and security of our elections and led to public confidence in our system that is unparalleled anywhere in the country.

It has not always been this way. In the early 1990s, we had several close elections that pointed out the vulnerabilities in our system. These close elections led Washington to become one of the first states to adopt statewide guidelines that ensured that each jurisdiction followed the same rules in determining how ballots are verified and counted. In addition, my State also adopted other requirements for testing and procedural consistency. It is my hope that this legislation will lead other States to follow our example and institute similar guidelines and procedures that will result in more people voting and making sure that all votes are properly cast and counted.

Our challenge, at the federal level, is to ensure that in passing legislation that reduces hurdles to civic participation across in country, we respect the role of the States in selecting types of voting that work well for their citizens and lead to maximum participation. I believe that this bill as amended does that, and I thank the chairman of the Rules Committee for his commitment to this bill and to ensuring that States have the flexibility to keep their systems in place.

This bill, by setting minimum standards and by guaranteeing the Federal Government will provide the funds necessary to purchase new equipment, takes very important steps forward in guaranteeing to every American that not only do they have the right to vote, but that when they cast their vote it will be counted.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate now proceed to a period of morning business with Senators allowed to speak therein for a period not to exceed 10 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TRIP TO LATIN AMERICA

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, I would like to report briefly on a trip to Latin America which I made last month before the Senate went into session in January.

This trip took me to a number of Latin American countries to discuss issues of trade and drug control. The